

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for assisting a user to efficiently query for product information and promotional information available from electronic commerce websites over the Internet, said method comprising the steps of:
 - 5 checking a local database to find a match to a user query, wherein the user query relates to at least one product said user desires to find product information for from at least one available website;
 - if the local database contains at least one match to the user query, accepting a selection input from the user, wherein the user refines the user query by specifically
 - 10 selecting the at least one product;
 - determining whether the local database has cached product information relating to the at least one product within a specified time limit;
 - if the local database has not cached the product information within the specified time limit, polling the at least one available website, wherein the product
 - 15 information for the at least one selected product is retrieved and is cached by the local database; and
 - displaying the polling results to the user, wherein the user may locate the at least one available website offering the at least one product associated with the desired product information.

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2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of accepting the user query, wherein the user query is entered by way of a user interface.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the user query includes at least one of a book title, an author, a music title, and an artist.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the specified time limit is a variable, said
5 variable being set dynamically depending on Internet congestion and use of the at least one available website.

5. The method of claim 4, further comprising the step of:
displaying to the user the elapsed since the product information was last
10 cached in the local database.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
accepting override input from the user, wherein the user may initiate polling of the at least one available website for the product information after the local database
15 has cached the product information within the specified time limit.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of polling the at least one available website for the product information further comprises the steps of:
receiving a request to poll at least one assigned website, wherein the at least
20 one assigned website is one of the at least one available websites;
analyzing the at least one assigned website utilizing the HTML structure of the assigned website;
determining a location of the product information within the at least one

assigned website;

extracting the product information from said location; and

transmitting the extracted product information, wherein the extracted product information is transmitted to a base server, and wherein the base server directs the local database to cache the extracted product information.

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8. The method of claim 7, further comprising the step of using a search function to address and check the at least one assigned website.

10 9. The method of claim 7, further comprising the step of transmitting the request to poll the at least one assigned website, wherein the at least one assigned website is one of the at least one available websites.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein displaying the polling results to the user further comprises the steps of:

15 receiving the product information, wherein the product information is received at a base server;

arranging the product information; and

displaying the arranged price information by way of an HTML page.

20 11. The method of claim 10, wherein the product information is arranged by price in order of lowest price to highest price.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the arranged product information is displayed along with a URL link of the at least one available website selling the at least one product at that price.

5 13. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of displaying the cached product information by way of an HTML page.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the product information is arranged by price in order of lowest price to highest price.

10 15. The method of claim 14, wherein the arranged product information is displayed along with a URL link of the at least one available website selling the at least one product at that price.

15 16. The method of claim 1, wherein polling the at least one available website further includes retrieving promotional information from the at least one available website.

20 17. The method of claim 16, wherein the retrieving is performed by utilizing the available website's HTML structure and a search function to address and check the available website.

18. The method of claim 16, wherein the retrieving further includes accepting the promotional information through a direct link to the at least one available website at specific, agreed upon times.

5 19. The method of claim 18, wherein the direct link includes at least one of dedicated HTML links and XML queries.

10 20. The method of claim 16, wherein the retrieving further includes accepting the promotional information through a secure data entry area located at a base server.

15 21. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of storing the retrieved promotional information in the local database.

22. The method of claim 21, further comprising the steps of:
accepting a user input, wherein the user input indicates that the user wishes to view the promotional information and selects the at least one available website the user is interested in;
accumulating a specified number of results for each of the at least one selected websites, wherein the specified number of results consists of the promotional information associated with the at least one selected website and is determined based on at least one of a time when results were retrieved and an order of importance determined by the at least one selected website; and

generating a display of the specified number of results for each of the at least one selected websites, wherein the display further includes a link to the at least one selected website and a time and date stamp indicating when the promotional information was last retrieved.

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23. The method of claim 22, wherein the specified number of results is five.

24. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of caching the product information, wherein the local database caches product information such as 10 the product title, product description, and product price after the product information has been retrieved from the at least one available website.

25. The method of claim 24, wherein caching the product information further includes the steps of:
15 checking the local database to determine whether the local database is storing at least one product that is associated with defective data;
 if the at least one product is associated with defective data, transmitting a request to poll at least one assigned website associated with the at least one product, wherein the at least one assigned website is one of the at least one available websites;
20 receiving the polling request;
 polling the at least one assigned website, wherein correct product data for the at least one product is sought;
 retrieving the correct product data; and

processing the retrieved correct product data, wherein the defective data associated with the at least one product is corrected.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein polling further includes the steps of:
5 analyzing the at least one assigned website utilizing the assigned website's

HTML structure;

 determining a location of the correct product data within the at least one assigned website;

 extracting the correct product data; and

10 transmitting the extracted correct product data, wherein the extracted correct product data is transmitted to a base server and the base server directs the local database to store the correct product data.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein analyzing the at least one assigned website further comprises the step of searching the at least one assigned website based on at least one of the product title, author, artist, creator, manufacturer, and other descriptive data.

28. The method of claim 25, wherein processing the retrieved correct product data further comprises the steps of:

 cataloguing assigned website links associated with the correct product data in terms of reliability, wherein the catalogued data is placed in a report;

 checking low-reliability links, wherein an editorial entity determines if the

low-reliability links are actually associated with at least one product; and
adding the correct product information to the local database, wherein the
product information associated with the at least one product is corrected.

5 29. The method of claim 28, wherein the cataloguing the assigned website
links associated with the correct product data in terms of reliability further comprises
the steps of:

 comparing at least one of the product title and the artist/author as found on the
assigned website to the product information stored in the local database; and
10 verifying the reliability by comparing a product description as found on the
assigned website to the product description stored in the local database.

30. The method of claim 28, wherein the editorial entity is a human
editorial crew.

15 31. The method of claim 28, wherein the defective data includes the lack
of a unique product ID required by the associated at least one assigned website and
wherein the report consists of the product title, a standard industry identification
number associated with the product, and a probable link to other available websites
20 that may be associated with the product.

32. A system for assisting a user to efficiently query for product
information and promotional information available from electronic commerce

websites over the Internet, said system comprising:

at least one sub-server, wherein the at least one sub-server sends requests to
and receives replies from at least one available website based on a user query;

a server, operably connected to the at least one sub-server, wherein the server
5 communicates the user query to and controls the operation of the at least one sub-
server; and

a local database, operably connected to the server, wherein the local database
stores product and promotional information and wherein the local database is updated
at specific time intervals or at a request from a user.

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33. The system of claim 32, further comprising:

a user machine, wherein the user machine allows the user to input requests for
product and promotional information; and

a network accessible by the user machine, wherein the user machine may
15 access the server through the network and the server may report the replies from the at
least one available website based on the user query.

34. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for assisting a
user to efficiently query for product information and promotional information
20 available from electronic commerce websites over the Internet, the instructions
comprising the following steps:

checking a local database to find a match to a user query, wherein the user
query relates to at least one product a user desires to find product information for

from at least one available website;

if the local database contains at least one match to the user query, accepting a selection input from the user, wherein the user refines the user query by specifically selecting the at least one product;

- 5 determining whether the local database has cached product information relating to the at least one product within a specified time limit, wherein the specified time limit is a variable that is set dynamically depending on Internet congestion and use of the at least one available website;
 - 10 if the local database has not cached the product information within the specified time limit, polling the at least one available website, wherein the product information for the at least one selected product is retrieved and is cached by the local database; and
 - 15 displaying the polling results to the user, wherein the user may locate the at least one available website offering the at least one product associated with the desired product information.

35. The computer-readable medium of claim 34, the instructions further comprising accepting the user query, wherein the user query is entered by way of a user interface.

36. The computer-readable medium of claim 34, the instructions further comprising the step of:

displaying to the user how much of the specified time limit has elapsed since the product information was last cached in the local database.

37. The computer-readable medium of claim 34, the instructions further
5 comprising the step of:

accepting override input from the user, wherein the user may initiate polling of the at least one available website for the product information even though the local database has cached the product information within the specified time limit.

10 38. The computer-readable medium of claim 34, the instructions for
polling the at least one available website for the product information further
comprising the step of:

transmitting a request to poll at least one assigned website, wherein the at least one assigned website is one of the at least one available websites.

15 receiving the request to poll the at least one assigned website;
analyzing the at least one assigned website utilizing the assigned website's
HTML structure, wherein a search function is used to address and check the at least one assigned website;

20 determining a location of the product information within the at least one assigned website;

extracting the product information; and
transmitting the extracted product information, wherein the extracted product information is transmitted to a base server and wherein the base server directs the

local database to cache the extracted product information.

39. The computer-readable medium of claim 34, the instructions for displaying the polling results to the user further comprising the step of:

5 receiving the product information, wherein the product information is received at a base server;

arranging the product information; and

displaying the arranged price information by way of an HTML page.

10 40. The computer-readable medium of claim 39, wherein:

the product information is arranged by price in order of lowest price to highest price; and

the arranged product information is displayed along with a URL link of the at least one available website selling the at least one product at that price.

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41. The computer-readable medium of claim 34, the instructions further comprising the step of:

displaying the cached product information by way of an HTML page, wherein: the product information is arranged by price in order of lowest price to highest

20 price; and

the arranged product information is displayed along with a URL link of the at least one available website selling the at least one product at that price.

42. The computer-readable medium of claim 34, the instructions for polling the at least one available website further comprising the steps of:

accepting a user input, wherein the user input indicates that the user wishes to view promotional information and selects the at least one available website the user is interested in;

polling the at least one available website, wherein polling further includes retrieving the promotional information from the at least one available web;

accumulating a specified number of results for each of the at least one selected websites, wherein the specified number of results consists of the promotional

10 information associated with the at least one selected website and is determined based on the at least one selected website and is determined based on at least one of a time when results were retrieve and an order of importance determined by the at least one selected website;

storing the retrieved promotional information in the local database; and

15 generating a display of the specified number of results for each of the at least one selected websites, wherein the display further includes a link to the at least one selected website and a time and date stamp indicating when the promotional information was last retrieved.

20 43. The computer-readable medium of claim 42, wherein the instructions for retrieving are performed by utilizing the available website's HTML structure and a search function to address and check the available website.

44. The computer-readable medium of claim 42, wherein the instructions for retrieving further comprise the step of:

accepting the promotional information through a direct link to the at least one available website at specific, agreed upon times and wherein the direct link includes at least one of dedicated HTML links and XML links.

5 45. The computer-readable medium of claim 42, wherein the instructions for retrieving comprise the step of:

accepting the promotional information through a secure data entry area located 10 at a base server.

46. The computer-readable medium of claim 34, the instructions further comprising the step of:

caching the product information, wherein the local database caches product 15 information such as the product title, product description, and product price after the product information has been retrieved from the at least one available website.

47. The computer-readable medium of claim 46, the instructions for caching the product information further comprising the steps of:

20 checking the local database to determine whether the local database is storing at least one product that is associated with defective data;
if the at least one product is associated with defective data, transmitting a request to poll at least one assigned website associated with the at least one product,

wherein the at least one assigned website is one of the at least one available websites;

receiving the polling request;

polling the at least one assigned website, wherein correct product data for the at least one product is sought;

5 retrieving the correct product data; and

processing the retrieved correct product data, wherein the defective data associated with the at least one product is corrected.

48. The computer-readable medium of claim 47, the instructions for

10 polling the at least one assigned website further comprising the steps of:

analyzing the at least one assigned website utilizing the assigned website's HTML structure, wherein the at least one assigned website is searched for correct product data based on at least one of the product title, author, artist, creator, manufacturer, and other descriptive data;

15 determining a location of the correct product data within the at least one assigned website;

extracting the correct product data; and

transmitting the extracted correct product data, wherein the extracted correct product data is transmitted to a base server and the base server directs the local 20 database to store the correct product data.

49. The computer-readable medium of claim 47, the instructions for

processing the retrieved correct product data further comprising the steps of:

cataloguing assigned website links associated with the correct product data in terms of reliability, wherein the catalogued data is placed in a report;

5 checking low-reliability links, wherein an editorial entity determines if the low-reliability links are actually associated with at least one product; and

5 adding the correct product information to the local database, wherein the product information associated with the at least one product is correct.

10 50. The computer-readable medium of claim 49, the instructions for cataloguing the assigned website links associated with the correct product data in terms of reliability further comprising the steps of:

 comparing at least one of the product title and the artist/author as found on the assigned website to the product information stored in the local database; and

 verifying the reliability by comparing a product description as found on the assigned website to the product description stored in the local database.